

WE CLAIM:

1. A system for enabling a user to access to a voicemail service comprising:
  - a customer premises equipment (CPE) at a user location for use by a user, the CPE comprising a plurality of character keys for use in dialing a sequence of characters; and
  - a central office switch in communication with the CPE, the central office switch comprising:
    - a supplementary service processor operative to receive the sequence of characters from the CPE, generate a query to a supplementary service database when the sequence of characters is a predetermined n-character messaging sequence where  $n < 7$ , and receive a call forwarding number from the supplementary service database;
    - wherein the central office switch is operative to connect the CPE with a voicemail service in response to the call forwarding number; and
    - wherein the supplementary service database is operative to determine whether the user has access to the voicemail service using a caller identifier and transmit the call forwarding number to the central office switch if the user has access to the voicemail service.
2. The system of Claim 1, wherein the central office switch is further operative to prevent access to the voicemail service in response to a determination that the user does not have access to the voicemail service.
3. The system of Claim 1, wherein the central office switch further comprises a router.
4. The system of Claim 1, wherein the central office switch further comprises an error handler for sending an error message to the CPE in response to a determination that the user does not have access to the voicemail service.

5. The system of Claim 1, wherein the n-character messaging sequence includes a first '\*' star character.

6. The system of Claim 1, wherein  $n = 3$ .

7. The system of Claim 6, wherein the 3-character messaging sequence includes a first '\*' star character followed by a two number sequence.

8. The system of Claim 1, wherein the n-character messaging sequence consists of the sequence \*98.

9. The system of Claim 1, wherein the supplementary service processor further comprises a routing table for storing a call forwarding number for a user that has access the voicemail service.

10. The system of Claim 1, wherein the supplementary service database further comprises a redirecting identifier for connecting the user to an error message when the user is temporarily prevented from using the predetermined n-character messaging sequence to access the voicemail service.

11. A method for controlling a user's access to a voicemail service from a customer premises equipment (CPE) that is coupled with a central office switch, the method comprising:

- (a) receiving an n-character messaging sequence transmitted from the CPE where  $n < 7$ ;
- (b) determining whether the user has access to the voicemail service using a caller identifier; and
- (c) connecting the CPE to the voicemail service if the user has access to the voicemail service.

12. The method of Claim 11, wherein the n-character messaging sequence includes a first '\*' star character.

13. The method of Claim 11, wherein the n-character messaging sequence consists of the sequence \*98.

14. The method of Claim 11, wherein (c) comprises using a call forwarding number to connect the CPE to the voicemail service.

15. The method of Claim 11, further comprising:

(d) preventing access to the voicemail service if the user does not have access to the voicemail service.

16. A method for controlling a user's access to a voicemail service from a customer premises equipment (CPE) that is coupled with a central office switch, the method comprising:

(a) receiving an n-character messaging sequence at the central office switch, where  $n < 7$ ;

(b) generating a query in response to (a);

(c) determining whether the user has access to the voicemail service using a caller identifier, in response to receipt of the query;

(d) sending a call forwarding number to the central office switch if the user has access to the voicemail service; and

(e) connecting the CPE to the voicemail service using the call forwarding number.

17. The method of Claim 16, further comprising:

(f) preventing access to the voicemail service in response to a determination that the user does not have access to the voicemail service.

18. The method of Claim 16, further comprising:

(f) sending an error message to the CPE in response to a determination that the user is not allowed access to the voicemail service.

19. The method of Claim 16, wherein (b) comprises transmitting a caller identifier from the central office switch to a supplementary service database.

20. The method of Claim 19, wherein (c) further comprises verifying whether the user identified by the caller identifier subscribes to the voicemail service.